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PALESTINE REFUGEE PROBLEM

Settlement of the Arab Refugees of Palestine: The Agricultural Aspects

A. ASSUMPTIONS:

The following tentative suggestions for a project of agricultural settlement for the Palestine Arab refugees are made on the basis of the following assumptions:

1. That the project will be carried out with the full cooperation of the Governments of those countries where settlement will take place.

2. That work on this basis will begin as soon as the present relief activity of the United Nations consumes the funds that have been made available for this purpose.

3. That there will be some temporary relief work under the new program until permanent settlement supplants relief completely.

4. That the refugees themselves are willing to give up their previous homes, now in Israeli territory, and settle in new Arab territory.

5. That facilities for agricultural settlement will be offered chiefly, if not exclusively, to the farming element among the refugees.

B. PROCEDURE

1. It is suggested that, as a first basic step in approaching the problem, a comprehensive survey, worked out by competent experts, be made of the refugee situation, with a view to gathering authentic information relative to such items as are pertinent to a project of agricultural settlement. The following are examples of the type of information desired:

a. Total numbers, present locations, age composition, religious composition, sex composition and general health conditions of the refugees.

b. Regular occupational status prior to departure from home. This is aimed at separating the refugees into farming and non-farming groups,

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groups, and into groups of village dwellers and city dwellers. These two types of distinction are essential in view of the fact that a small minority of the village people are engaged in simple services or trade, and that a small minority of the city people are engaged in farming.

c. Further analysis of the farming group with respect to major types of farming -- dry, irrigation, diversified, specialized, etc.

d. Previous location, with respect to major regions of the country and to specific communities to which the refugees belonged.

e. Family ties and blood relationships, with respect to the biological family unit, the larger compound unit, the kinship group and the tribe.

f. Major organizational features of the community to which the refugee belonged -- its farming, trade, services, school, local government, leadership, cooperative, feuds, religious activity, means of transportation and communication, etc.

g. Degree of literacy and other educational attainments.

h. Land tenure status whether large owner, small owner, or landless sharecropper.

i. Type of equipment used in farming.

j. Degree of willingness to settle in new areas; and preference for certain locations with reasons for such preference.

k. Other pertinent information.

2. On the basis of the amassed information, it will be necessary to identify those refugee groups with farming or village background, who are destined for agricultural settlement, and classify them into a number of categories, such as:

a. Those belonging to the same clan or tribe.

b. Those belonging to the same community and to the same region.

c. Those

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c. Those with similar farming background and land tenure status.

d. Followers of the same religion or sect.

e. Those belonging to communities that could be characterized in general as integrated, cooperative and progressive, as distinguished from those that are disorganized, or split by conflicts, or conservative.

f. Those who prefer ultimate settlement in Israel, in Arab Palestine, in Transjordan, in Syria, in Iraq, or in other countries.

3. The above-mentioned survey and other pertinent studies and plans should be undertaken a sufficiently long time before actual settlement is begun. Otherwise the numerous details and demands arising from the operation would obscure the vision of those doing the job and result in much disruption and wasted effort, with greater risk of failure.

4. The transfer from the UNRPR program to the new program should be accomplished gradually, and soon enough to avoid the occurrence of a "post-UNRRA" period, with its attendant wastage of supplies, equipment and personnel, and the disruption of morale among the refugees.

5. Early in the program, a team of extension workers should be formed chiefly of local personnel under expert foreign guidance. These workers would be responsible for carrying out a practical educational campaign in order to prepare the refugees for settlement and to guide them after they settle. This would be continued for several years, until the new community is self-dependent.

6. The interim relief period should be utilized to the extent practicable for the benefit of the permanent program. Intensive training of the refugees could be undertaken during this period. Also, their manpower could be utilized directly in connection with the planned settlement projects. This is preferable to engaging the refugees in haphazard activities, in order to keep them busy.

7. As soon as possible, each group of refugees should assume responsibility for the building up of its own settlement project.

8. The refugees should be distributed in settlement groups on the basis of similarity in the major criteria of their previous life,

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insofar as this is possible. The more the new settlements resemble the old communities, with respect to type of farming and general organization, the greater will be the degree of success.

9. In the event that it is necessary to establish priorities for resettlement, the operation should begin by resettling those groups who are more willing to settle in specified localities, and who are known to be integrated, cooperative and progressive.

10. After the completion of the project, the program should provide for a "follow-up" period, with a view to determining whether the new community has taken permanent root. In such undertakings there is always a residue of social, economic or agricultural problems which are revealed only with the passing of time. If the settlements are not assisted in facing such problems, the achievements may be vitiated.

11. The various agricultural settlements which have been established previously in the region, Circassians, Assyrians, Armenians, Bedouin and others, should be studied. A knowledge of the factors making for success or failure in these projects should be of great value to the program.

12. Finally, it is strongly recommended that no settlement be attempted unless full and genuine cooperation is guaranteed by the governments concerned, and by the people of the locality involved. In certain of the previous resettlement projects, the local population was not consulted, and the resulting situation was an unwholesome one.

C. TYPE AND LOCATION OF SETTLEMENT

1. It is strongly recommended that, if the Government of Israel is agreeable, priority consideration be given to the possibility of repatriating as many of the refugees as are willing to live under Israeli rule, since this is the most natural, the least costly and least disruptive solution. If the refugees were returned to their own homes, lands, and communities, they would require relatively little assistance, consisting mainly of repairing homes, replenishing livestock, and provision of simple equipment and seed. Satisfactory resettlement could be effected in a year or two.

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2. If this solution proves impossible for political reasons, or if the number repatriated proves small, priority consideration should be given to Arab Palestine as a place for settlement. The following reasons are given in support of this choice:

a. More than 60 percent of the refugees are already concentrated there (460,000 out of a total of 750,000).

b. A high degree of similarity exists between present Arab Palestine and the areas from which the refugees fled, with respect to such basic factors as community organization, type of farming, food, religious affiliation, traditions, language, etc. The change would not involve too much adjustment on the part of the refugees.

c. Since the Arabs of Palestine have a well-developed sense of belonging to one national entity, the newcomers are more likely to feel at home in Palestine than in distant Arab countries.

d. The physical proximity of the new home to the old home will make for better psychological adjustment.

e. A great many blood ties, which are extremely important among the Arabs, exist between the residents of Arab Palestine and the refugees, as well as economic and social ties. The number and intensity of such ties, which make for the integration of groups, naturally decrease with distance from the frontiers of Palestine.

f. Arab Palestine would possess sufficient land capacity to take care of the extra farming population, provided two conditions are met:

(1) That Transjordan would be willing to include in the settlement area its side of the Jordan valley and possibly other neighboring portions of its cultivable land. Under a joint program involving Arab Palestine and Transjordan, the majority of the farming refugees could be settled in this area, since the total number in this category is not more than 50 or 60 percent of the refugees, or 400,000 people. (It is assumed that most of the urban refugees would settle in cities of neighboring Arab countries, and that a certain number would find their way back to Israel.)

(2) That a

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(2) That a comprehensive program of intensive agricultural development would be undertaken over a period of 10 to 15 years. This would require expansion of irrigation, soil conservation, improvement of seed and livestock, introduction of modern methods of cultivation, processing and marketing, and the development of complementary agricultural industries.

g. A portion of the necessary land could be purchased from present owners, under the inducement that they would share in the benefits of the developmental project; another small portion would come from Waqf land (land dedicated to religious or charitable organizations); a third source would be state domain.

h. In addition to solving the refugee problem, this project would serve as a model demonstration to the rest of the Middle East.

3. A third possibility for refugee settlement is offered by Syria. This country has a population of some 3,000,000, with a total area of 60,000 square miles. The potentially cultivable area is enormous, although the area actually under crops in any one year does not exceed 3,000,000 acres, and the economic situation requires additional population. Syria alone could ultimately accomodate all the refugees, or at least a majority.

a. The Jezirah region of northeastern Syria offers a unique opportunity for settlement and development. This area is an extensive plain, in a temperate zone, with rich soil. In the northern portion, rainfall is abundant, and in the southern portion water is available for irrigation. The Jezirah is traversed by two rivers, the Khabour and its tributaries, and the Balikh. Some irrigation from the Khabour is already underway. This fertile region is sparsely populated and sparsely cultivated. It has a cultivable potential of some 3,000,000 acres.

It might be possible to reach an agreement with the Syrian Government under which it would offer the refugees land from state domain, and external assistance would be made available to carry out an overall program of development for the refugees and the population as well. A precedent was established about 15 years ago, when several Assyrian refugee communities were settled in this region and given free title to state domain land. It should also be possible to purchase land from private owners, in return for benefits from the program.

In the event

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In the event that Syria proved willing to cooperate in such a program, the selected refugees could be transported to the Jezirah in a relatively short time. Since the climate is mild, they could be established in tents or temporary dwellings, and put to work immediately on construction of permanent adobe homes, roads construction, expansion of irrigation works and the planting of crops.

b. Another promising opportunity in Syria is offered by the Ghab Valley of the Orontis River, in northwestern Syria. The course of the river lies in the middle of the valley, which is surrounded by hills. For several months each year, the valley is flooded and is a malarial area. Although the soil is rich alluvial, the residents of the area are able to make only scanty use of it. The area involved is estimated at 100,000 acres.

Since this is practically waste land, Syria might be willing to offer it to the refugees. This project calls for the construction of a small diversion dam at the upper end of the valley and an irrigation canal along each side. During the rainy season, the two canals would serve as additional water courses and prevent flooding of the valley; during the dry season they would serve for gravity irrigation.

c. There are several other areas in Syria where small refugee groups could be settled, along the course of the Orontis, in the Aleppo area in the north and in the Houran in the south.

4. The greatest possibility for agricultural expansion in the Middle East exists in Iraq. Iraq combines a great zone of rain farming in the north with another great zone of irrigation farming in the south. The soil is chiefly rich alluvial soil, built up by two great river systems, the Tigris and the Euphrates, which run throughout the length of the country. The area actually under crops each year is estimated at not more than 20% of the potentially cultivable area, which in turn is estimated at 25,000,000 acres.

a. In recent years the Iraq Government, as part of its national program for tribal settlement, has completed one or two irrigation projects, with ample running water and fertile soil. However, the tribal folk have not taken readily to settled agricultural life, and the projects, therefore, have been wasted, to some extent. If the Government should prove willing to allow some of the refugees to settle on these lands, it is possible that they would serve as a stabilizing nucleus around which the nomads would gradually settle.

b. State domain in Iraq is extensive, both in the rain zone and in the irrigation zone. It is possible that the Iraq Government might

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might be willing to respond to offer the land if the necessary technical aid and equipment, including pumps for lifting water from the river were made available from external sources.

5. A fifth possible approach is for the United Nations, or interested member states to enter into a cooperative agreement with all of the Governments concerned, with a view to solving the refugee problem, and at the same time embarking upon overall agricultural development on a regional basis.

Under such an approach, the refugees would serve as the stimulus for action, as the condition for participation by external sources, and as demonstration centers for each of the countries concerned. Being dislocated and making a new beginning, these people are more likely to adopt new methods of cultivation than the established native farmers.

If such an agreement should be made, the refugees should be divided into groups, on the basis of their backgrounds and preferences, and allocated to the countries concerned, according to the capacity of each. A regional council of technicians and administrators, representing the various countries and the United Nations or interested member states, would serve as the center through which experiences, problems and guidance would be exchanged.

6. Apart from repatriation, possibly the quickest and least costly solution would be the absorption of the refugees by large estates, chiefly in Syria and Iraq, where there is a shortage of agricultural manpower. Under this solution, the refugees would be employed as sharecroppers or tenants.

This solution might be the least desirable, however, since conditions of sharecropping in the region permit a meager existence, and since most of the Palestine farmers were independent land owners. Moreover, any powers proposing or executing this solution would become propaganda targets for those who profess to be champions of peasant emancipation.

In the event that it proves necessary to utilize this solution to some extent, the landlord should be induced to offer the tenant a contract providing for decent conditions and a greater share of the produce. In return the landlord would be guaranteed the extension

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of technical aid to his tenants, which would result in increased output and improvement of the land.

In conclusion, the Middle East is ripe for action by the United States on the basis of an enlightened self-interest policy. It has a substantial agricultural potential that could be realized for the benefit of its deprived masses. The Palestine crisis has shaken the Arab countries into a realization of their internal socio-economic weaknesses. More than ever they are ready for some constructive action. It is an important area strategically, by virtue of its great oil resources and its location between the frontiers of democracy and communism. The refugee situation offers the United States a unique opportunity to embark upon a long-range program of development for the area in cooperation with the Arab countries.

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